

This past week has been eventful for Task Force Eagle. Fortunately, we had wonderful weather with plenty of sunshine and warm temperatures reaching into the high 70s. The Pakistanis have said that this winter has been mild, a true blessing for the earthquake victims living in the mountains.

We flew fewer humanitarian assistance missions this week due to the Islamic holiday of Ashura. It marks two historical events: the day Noah left the Ark and the day that Moses was saved from Egyptians by Allah. Ashura has been a day of fasting for Sunni Muslims since the days of the early Muslim community. Shi'a Muslims in particular use the day to commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. In Shi'ite communities, Ashura is a solemn day: plays re-enacting the martyrdom are often staged and many take part in mourning rituals. Unfortunately, the holiday tends to result in increased violence between Muslim religious sects. As a result, the Pakistani government shut down the airspace and limited ground travel for three days. We did not receive any threats and our Soldiers remained safe throughout the holiday period.

A bacterial outbreak hit Task Force Eagle hard earlier in the week. Almost 50 Soldiers fell sick. Our medical team did a great job taking care of our Soldiers. Additionally, the dining facility took extra measures to ensure healthy preparation and presentation of food. Soldiers were back to normal within three days.

On Wednesday, 8 February, LTG Sanchez, USAREUR Deputy Commander, visited Task Force Eagle. In the morning, our aircrews flew him over the earthquake impact area and to see 212th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital in Muzaffarabad. In the afternoon he met with TF Eagle Soldiers, toured our life support area, and listened to a series of briefings. LTG Sanchez was very complimentary of our Soldiers and their achievements.

On Friday, 10 February, our aircrews flew two Australian Generals to a field hospital at Dhanni Camp. The Generals also visited with Soldiers at Qasim Airbase. That evening I had the privilege of presenting U.S. Army awards to seven Australian soldiers. Under the command of MAJ Steve Jobson, Task Force 632.1 has demonstrated a high level of military professionalism, work ethic, and commitment to duty. They have been an invaluable asset to Task Force Eagle and its outstanding mission accomplishment.

On Saturday morning, 11 February, the Australians hosted Morning Tea in honor of 4th Brigade Soldiers. MAJ Jobson expressed his appreciation through gifts and kind remarks. We then enjoyed a delicious spread of cheese, crackers, fruit, and sandwiches. This event was a fitting way to pay tribute to the relationship established between our units during the past three months.

Task Force Eagle has started the transfer of authority for operations at Qasim Airbase. Staff sections are busy conducting handovers of essential tasks. Simultaneously, we are continuing efforts to deploy aircraft and personnel with B Company, 7th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

The remaining fifteen 4th Brigade Soldiers are scheduled to redeploy this week. We are certainly looking forward to reuniting with you in Germany. Please remember that Soldiers will be participating in mandatory reintegration briefings before starting leave or resuming garrison duties.

As always, thank you very much for continued prayers and support. See you soon!

Respectfully,

COL Bob Johnson